

Thanks to the persistence of his boyhood friend,
a Camas sailor killed in World War II finally is recorded ...

In Lasting Memory



JEREMIAH COUGHLAN/The Columbian

Letter-perfect: Bruce Fuerstenberg of Vancouver Granite Works puts the final touches to Curtis Sadd's name after sandblasting it into the Clark County Veterans War Memorial at the Vancouver Barracks. A series of misunderstandings kept the former Camas resident from getting local recognition for his wartime sacrifice.

"When it's all done, I think it will close this chapter of seeing my old friend get recognition for his service in World War II, and getting killed at such a young age."

Don Rekdahl



RICK BROWNE/The Columbian

In memory: From left, Don Rekdahl of Camas, Bob Peake of Washougal and Jim Nott of Camas pause beside the monument soon to bear the name of their friend, Curtis Sadd.

By TRICIA JONES
Columbian staff writer

Camas teen-ager Curtis Sadd joined the Navy two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and used one of his first paychecks to buy an expensive watch for his grandmother.

She died while Curtis was stationed somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. The timepiece went with her to her grave. A month and a day after Curtis' 21st birthday, four bombs and three Japanese suicide planes hit the aircraft carrier Saratoga off Iwo Jima. One kamikaze landed on Curtis' 5-inch gun.

All anybody ever found was his watch.

For decades, Curtis Wayne Sadd seemed lost to history in more ways than one. The Camas High School class of 1942 graduated without him while he was at war. There was no body to return for burial back home. Friends say as the years passed, his immediate relatives all died or moved from the area.

And no Clark County war memorial displayed his name alongside other fallen veterans.

But his buddies didn't forget Curtis. After five years of research and requests, delays and misunderstandings, the young sailor's name has joined those of 572 other Clark County residents killed in wars ranging from the Spanish-American to Vietnam.

Much of the credit goes to Curtis' boyhood friend, Don Rekdahl of Camas. Off and on over the years, Rekdahl has thought about his pal who grew up a couple blocks away and used to take camping trips with him.

"You wonder what he would have done if he'd been able to have his normal life," said Rekdahl, 74. "Later in life when your children are grown, sometimes you come back to some of your old friends."

Curtis wasn't there to come back to, but he was on Rekdahl's mind in 1995, when the retired lab technician went to the county courthouse in Vancouver to pay his taxes. Rekdahl paused outside the courthouse to scan what was then the area's main veterans' memorial. When he didn't see Curtis' name, he called the Camas-Washougal Veterans of Foreign Wars Post.

Bob Peake was the post commander.

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Remembering the good times: 'We were just regular boys'

Surviving
chums recall
Curtis Sadd
as an
easygoing
guy

Don Rekdahl last saw Curtis Sadd in the fall of 1943 in the San Francisco Bay area, where Rekdahl was going through U.S. Coast Guard boot camp and Sadd's aircraft carrier was docked for repairs. They met up for a short "liberty," saw a movie and spent a night on the town.

The teens from Camas spent most of their time together in search of fun. It wasn't a night for heavy talks about war.

Since he'd joined the Navy, Curtis and his boyhood friend had seen each other only a couple of times. Rekdahl was nearly two years younger than Sadd and entered military service later.

Rekdahl remembers only one conversation where Curtis talked about some of the fighting he'd seen.

Sadd started out with the aircraft carrier Enterprise. The so-called "Galloping Ghost" had fought in most carrier actions

of the Pacific war. Now Sadd was bound for transfer to the Saratoga, which the Navy was patching up for more combat.

The battles were bad, Curtis said. But afterward was worse. That's when sailors had to take buckets and go look for what was left of the guys who'd fought alongside them.

"Here's a kid 18 or 19 and thrown into that, having to identify body parts," said Rekdahl.

Rekdahl was at sea in the South Pacific when he got a letter from his mother telling him about Curtis' death on Feb. 21, 1945.

"I guess I wished at that moment I had been on a ship, doing more action than the one I was on," Rekdahl said, admitting, "That's a dumb thing to wish."



Courtesy of Don Rekdahl

Boyhood pals: Curtis Sadd and Don Rekdahl during a wartime visit in Seattle before Rekdahl joined the Coast Guard.

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